

## INTRODUCTION

Careful stewardship of rivers and streams is essential to meeting the goals for restoring the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Riparian buffers play a critical role in the landscape, protecting water quality by filtering runoff and removing nutrients and sediment; protecting living resources by supplying food, habitat and temperature-moderating shade; protecting the shoreline integrity from erosion impacts; and moderating flood damages.

Understanding these environmental benefits, the Chesapeake Bay Program convened a Riparian Forest Buffer Panel in 1994. The multi-jurisdictional panel was charged with developing policy to enhance conservation and restoration of riparian forest buffers in the Bay watershed.

For two years, the 31-member panel, chaired by Virginia State Forester Jim Garner, met regularly and developed goals and recommendations. In November 1996, the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council adopted these goals for member states and federal agencies:

- To assure, to the extent feasible, that all streams and shorelines will be protected by a forested or other riparian buffer
- To conserve and manage existing forests along all streams and shorelines
- To increase the use of all types of riparian buffers and restore riparian forests on 2,010 miles of stream and shoreline in the watershed by 2010, targeting efforts where they will be of greatest value to water quality and living resources

Also, the Executive Council adopted five policy recommendations:

- Enhance program coordination and accountability
- Promote private sector involvement
- Enhance incentives
- Support research, monitoring, and technology transfer
- Promote education and information

Each Bay Program partner agreed to develop an implementation plan for their respective governor by June 30, 1998, including benchmarks on how these goals and recommendations will be met.



*"It is a beautiful and delightful land with clear rivers and brookes running into a faire Bay. It affords few vegetables or stock for there is little grass, but for that which grows in the marshes, for this country is completely overgrown with trees."*

— Captain John Smith, 1607

## ***Goal of Virginia Riparian Buffer Implementation Plan***

***The overall goal of this plan is to ensure, to the extent feasible, that all streams and shorelines in the Commonwealth will be protected by an adequate riparian buffer.***

This program will be implemented state-wide. The agencies of the Commonwealth will work with interested organizations, businesses and private landowners to establish, enhance and maintain various kinds of riparian buffers, as appropriate for the setting and use of the land, recognizing that forested buffers are the ideal. The support and participation of private landowners is the key to the success of the plan, because the overwhelming majority of land adjacent to Virginia streams is in private ownership.

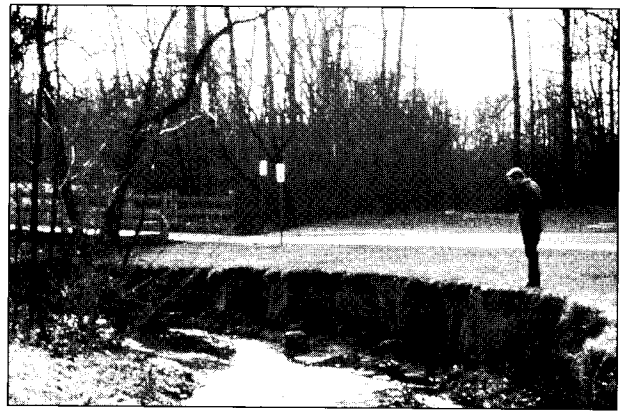
The Commonwealth's commitment to restore 610 miles of riparian forested buffers within Virginia's portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed is a subset of this overall plan. However, riparian buffers will be counted as part of the 610-mile goal only if they meet the standards (width, species composition, stream types, and management options) found in Appendix B. Achieving the Commonwealth's goals will be a vital contribution toward Virginia's commitment to protect all the waters of the Commonwealth.

## ***Plan Development***

The Virginia Riparian Forest Buffer Panel was originally convened by the Secretary of Natural Resources during the 1994 Chesapeake Bay Riparian Forest Buffer Panel process to consider the Virginia landowner perspective. The Secretary reassembled this group (see Acknowledgments, inside the front cover) in spring 1997, under the leadership of State Forester James Garner.

The panel has met regularly for a year to develop this plan. A stakeholder meeting, involving representatives of close to 40 Virginia agencies and private organizations, was held in October 1997 to refine strategies. The panel created a draft implementation plan and conducted five public meetings around the state in March and April of 1998. Comments received are incorporated into this final plan.

This implementation plan reaffirms Virginia's pledge to restore the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Believing strongly in the significance of this endeavor, both the public and private sectors in Virginia are actively involved. This plan highlights the essential role these partnerships need to play in effective stewardship of rivers and streams, enhancing water quality and living resources, and fulfilling long-term environmental goals.



## ***Volunteer Involvement***

To be successful, this initiative requires tremendous participation by Virginians from all walks of life. In fact, riparian buffer restoration work has already begun; over ten miles of new forested buffers were created in 1997 and twenty miles in the spring of 1998.

Everyone is welcome to become involved — individuals, landowners, organizations of any size or type, and agencies at any level. Why play an active role? Riparian buffers provide an array of benefits critical to making the environment a healthier place to live for people as well as fish and wildlife. Riparian buffers improve water and air quality, moderate stream temperature, increase aquatic and wildlife habitat, and help stabilize stream-banks. Riparian forest buffers offer recreational opportunities. Riparian buffers add to the beauty of the land. Riparian buffers protect the value of land and can produce revenue. And, riparian buffers offer privacy.

This is a chance to be a leader in enhancing Virginia's environment. Everyone can help protect or establish a forest or other buffer type. Interested? Call your local Department of Forestry or Soil and Water Conservation District office to find out what you or your organization can do to reach Virginia's 610-mile goal. Or, you can complete the attached *Count Me In* sign-up sheet.

## ***Future Steps***

The Virginia Riparian Buffer Work Group will be established to oversee the implementation of this dynamic and long-term plan to restore Virginia's riparian buffers. Each year, the group will evaluate progress and revise strategies as needed to ensure goals are achieved. A comprehensive assessment of the plan will be conducted every three years.